

Surah 112

*Al-Ikhlās*Makkan/Madinan¹

4 verses



IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE COM-
PASSIONATE, THE MERCIFUL

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

The Context of Revelation

If we are to put together reports coming from Ubayy b. Ka'b, 'Ikrimah, Sa'id and Qatadah, either the pagans of Makkah or the Jews asked the Prophet to explain to them who exactly the God was that he was inviting the people to. According to some versions, they asked him to lay down His genealogy. Allah revealed this chapter (Ibn Jarir reworded: Au.). At least one version is in Tirmidhi (Ibn Kathir). Muslim has a similar report (Sayyid Ibrahim).

Merits of the *surah*

Some interpreters have pointed out that this is the only *surah* in the Qur'ān which talks nothing of either this world or the next. Allah is its sole subject (Ibn Jarir). It has also been pointed out that this is the only *surah* in the Qur'ān in which two

new Attributes of Allah - *Al-Ahad* and *Al-Samad* – have appeared. They have not appeared elsewhere; and significantly, together. This could be the reason why it has been said to be equal to one-third of the Qur'ān (Qurtubi).

'Ā'isha has reported in a *hadīth* of Bukhari (also in Muslim and others: Shawkani), that:

The Prophet sent out a group of people in a campaign. Their leader always ended his (recitations in the) Prayers with this chapter. When they came back they spoke of it to the Prophet. He ordered them to find out why he did that. The man answered that he loved to recite it because it depicted the Attributes of *Al-Rahman*. The Prophet remarked: "Let him know that Allah loves him too" (Qurtubi, Ibn Kathir).

Bukhari has another report coming from Anas. It says that, the Quba mosque had a leader in the Prayers who recited this *surah* (after *al-Fatiha* and) before any other recitation and even ended up with it. Finally, his followers spoke to him objecting that it did not look like it was permissible. He could either recite from other parts of the Qur'ān, which would suffice, or recite the *surah* alone if he wished to. But the man refused to budge. He told them that they were free to look for another person to lead them in Prayers if they were not satisfied with him. But they considered him better than anyone else and, as a matter of fact, did not wish him to be replaced. So when the Prophet visited them, they mentioned this to him. He asked the man: "O so and so! What prevents you from doing as they say? Why do you insist on its recitation?" He answered: "I love the *surah*." The Prophet assured him: "Your love of it will usher you into Paradise" (Qurtubi, Ibn Kathir, Shawkani).

Another report from Bukhari coming through Abu Sa'id says that a man heard another repeatedly reciting this *surah*. When he mentioned it to the Prophet - in belief that it could not be much of a virtue to be doing so - he told him: "It is equal to

one-third of the Qur'ān" (Qurtubi, Ibn Kathir).

Yet another report from Bukhari (also in Muslim: S.Ibrahim) with Abu Sa'id as the transmitter says that once the Prophet (*saws*) asked his Companions: "Is anyone of you weaker than that he should recite one-third of the Qur'ān every night?" They exclaimed: "Which of us can do that O Apostle?" He replied that this chapter is one-third of the Qur'ān. (Qurtubi, Ibn Kathir) Some reports say it "is one-third of the Qur'ān" while others say it is "equal" to one third of the Qur'ān. In fact, one report in Ahmad says it is equal to one-half of the Qur'ān (Ibn Kathir).

Finally, Imām Ahmad, and Tirmidhi with his approval, report 'Uqbah b. 'Amir saying that once when he met the Prophet he took the initiative by holding his hand and asking him: "O Apostle of Allah, in what lies the salvation of a Muslim?" He replied, "O 'Uqbah. Hold your tongue, let your home be enough for you and weep at your sins." Next time when he met him, the Prophet took the initiative to hold his hand and said: "O 'Uqbah! May I not tell you about three chapters better than anything in the Torah, the Gospels,

[1] Say, He, Allah, is the One,²

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ ﴿١﴾

the Psalms of David and the Magnificent Qur'ān itself?" I replied, "Sure do that, may my parents be sacrificed for you." In reply, he recited *surah al-Ikhlās* and the following two chapters and added: "'Uqbah! Do not forget them. Do not let a night pass before you have recited them." 'Uqbah says: "When I met the Prophet another time, I again took the initiative and held his hands in mine. I asked him: "O Apostle of Allah. Let me know of the best of good deeds". He said: "'Uqbah! Join him who cuts you asunder. Give him who denies you. And forgive him who wrongs you" (Ibn Kathir).

And here is at least one *hadith* about seeking Allah's protection from sicknesses with the help of these three last chapters of the Qur'ān. Bukhari has recorded 'A'isha as saying that, before sleep the Prophet used to recite these on his bed, blow into his hands and pass them over to the extent the hands reached his face, hands and body. He would do it three times (Ibn Kathir).

1. Ibn Mas'ud, Hasan, 'Ata', 'Ikrimah and Jabir have said that this is a Makkan chapter. On the other

hand, Ibn 'Abbas, Qatadah, Dahhak and Suddi have said that it is Madinan, although Ibn 'Abbas seems to have expressed a second opinion (Shawkani).

2. The *Ahad* (of the text is different from *Wahid* and) has the added connotations of absolute, continuous unity and the absence of equals (Sayyid Qutb).

Ahad is someone who is alone in His Being and Attributes, who has no associates, no equals, no partners, who has none similar to Him.

In contrast, by popular Hindu account, the Hindu gods number some 33 million (Shabbir).

The statement can also be found in "*Great Religions of the World*," a *National Geographic* publication. It states there (*Hinduism*, Amia Chakravarty, p. 39): 'By popular Hindu account, the Hindu gods number some 33 million.. Overarching all is Brahman, to be metamorphosed in the trinity of: Brahma, the Creator, Vishnu, the Preserver and Shiva, the Destroyer... Each of these have their consorts (e.g., Vishnu's consort is Lakhshmi - who is a goddess in her own right -

[2] Allah, the Eternal,³

اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ ﴿٢﴾

[3] He beget not,⁴ nor was He begotten,

لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ ﴿٣﴾

Shiva's consort is Durga and Krishna's is Radha). They all appear on earth as *avatars*. The triad is sometimes worshipped under the symbol of the mystic syllable *Om*.'

That is to say that the followers of other religions have treated God as if He belongs to a species (Mawdudi).

3. Samad: Literally the word is applied to one who has no stomach and, therefore, does not eat or drink. (That is, one who is not dependent on anything: Au.). That is the opinion of Ibn 'Abbas, Mujahid, Sa'id ibn Jubayr, Dahhak and many others. (It is also the opinion of Ibn Mas'ud: Shawkani). Yet, according to one report, Ibn 'Abbas has explained the term as meaning one whose attributes have reached the apex of development, and therefore, cannot be improved any further. Ibn Mas'ud (*ra*) has made a similar statement (Ibn Kathir).

"Eternal - One with no beginning and no end," is another interpretation that has come from the *Salaf*. Another is that of someone who supersedes all and who cannot be superseded by any (Ibn Jarir, Qurtubi).

Rabi' b. Anas has said that the term *samad* has been actually explained by what follows, that is, "He did not beget nor was He begotten" (Ibn Jarir). This is a good explanation (Ibn Kathir). Literally, *samad* would also imply one who stands in no one's need while everyone stands in need of him (Zamakhshari). In other words, one before whom people put forward their needs (Razi, Qurtubi, Ibn Kathir, Shawkani).

Asad comments: "Consequently, the *quality* of His being is beyond the range of human comprehension or imagination: which also explains why any attempt at "depicting" God by means of figurative representation or even abstract symbols must be qualified as a blasphemous denial of the truth."

4. The first two lines of the eight lines of the Apostolic Creed, a statement of faith used in the Roman Catholic Church, and so called because according to tradition it was composed by the 12 apostles, although actually developed from early baptism in the 3rd and 4th centuries, is as follows:

[4] And there is none comparable to Him.⁵

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ ﴿٤﴾

“I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord...”

(*Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 1, entry “The Apostolic Creed”) - Au.

Majid writes: “According to popular Hinduism, the creation was brought about by Brahma’s incest with his daughter (See ERE., II, p. 811).”

5. Bukhari has preserved the Prophet’s statement: “Allah, the Exalted, said, ‘Son of Adam cries lies to Me - while it behooves him not to do that; and he calls Me names - while it behooves him not to do that. As for his crying lies, he says ‘He will

not give me a new life after He has created me,’ while creating him the first time was not easier than a repeat can be. As for him calling Me names, it is to say that I have taken a son while I am One, the Eternal. I have not given birth nor was I given birth. There is none comparable to Me” (Ibn Kathir).

We have quoted Majid earlier (*Al-Baqarah*, note 233), where he wrote: “According to the Christians, God the Son, is the second Person of the Blessed Trinity. He is the only begotten and eternal Son of the Father. He is consubstantial with the Father” (Au.). مَشَتْ

